

Beginning in the name Allah ﷻ, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

All praise belongs to Allah ﷻ; who grants honour to those who remember Him. Infinite prayers, and all-embracing salutations be upon: Our master Muhammad ﷺ, the crown of galvanic Divine Presence, and whose remembrance is raised high; his ﷺ pure family; his ﷺ honorable companions; and upon all whom make much of His remembrance, whether standing, sitting, or upon their sides.

The Hadrah

The permissibility of the inspiring practice of remembering Allah ﷻ through the combination of collective corporeal movements and invocatory audition

Shaykh Mufti Wajid Iqbal ~ Essential Islam

Preface

The honourable tradition of the Hadrah - which literally means 'presence' - is the act of collectively imitating the actions of ecstasy as displayed by Sayyiduna Abu Bakr, Sayyiduna Ali, and Sayyiduna Jafar ibn Ali Talib (Allah is pleased with them all); all of which were elicited by the arrival of good news.

Despite this fact, some in the modern era object to this praiseworthy practice. Therefore, we write this article to categorically prove - without doubt - that the hadrah is not only permissible, but also recommended (mustahab).

Preamble

The discussion around the hadrah is split into six sections:

1. Overview of the Hadrah;
2. The Assembly;

3. Standing Remembrance;
4. Movements (Raqs) in Remembrance;
5. Vocal Remembrance;
6. Singing in Remembrance.

Overview of the Hadrah

The hadrah is a collective form of dhikr (remembrance of Allah ﷻ), which includes, the recitation of the noble Qur'an; Islamic sermons; recitation of litanies and prayers; devotional poetry that focuses on praising, as well as beseeching Allah ﷻ; poetic chanting in praise of the Prophet ﷺ; religious exhortations; rhythmic invocations of God's names, especially the name 'Allah'; as well as the testimony of faith.

The purpose of the hadrah is to stimulate and cultivate the mind, in order to absorb the hearts of the participants into the realm of 'Divine Presence'. If the environment is conducive - with the correct blend of spiritual courtesy and concentration - individuals can be propelled into transcendent states, and spiritual ecstasies.

With everyone seated, the hadrah begins with the recitation of the noble Qur'an. This is followed by the singing of **qas'aid**¹, as well as the **diwan**² of the saints; odes that encourage reflection, and lead to contemplation. This prelude prepares the hearts for the intensity of the hadrah itself.

Roused by the arrival of good news, usually when the birth of the final Messenger is mentioned by the munshids (singers), the assembly stands engulfed in the recitation of **salawat**³, during which the participants organise themselves (usually in a circle(s)) for the hadrah.

The hadrah then commences with the invocation of the name of the Divine Essence - Allah - by a Shaykh overseeing the hadrah. The assembly then continues to invoke the majestic name, while the munshids sing spiritual odes; this continues until the hadrah is drawn to a close.

¹ Devotional poetry

² Poems composed by the friends of Allah (i.e. the saints), which are noted for their ability to inspire.

³ The noble act of sending salutations, and blessings upon the final Messenger ﷺ

Upon its completion, those congregated now return to a sitting position, where they listen attentively to the recitation of the noble Qur'an, which is followed by a short sermon that is delivered by a Shaykh.

Essentially, the hadrah purifies the hearts of the attendees, freeing them from any claims they may have, while the sermon fills the empty minds with knowledge and wisdom, disciplining those who experienced spiritual openings, and at the same time sparking transcendent introspective states.

The Assembly

One of the key features of the hadrah is the gathering of a group of people for the sake of Allah ﷻ, in order to remember Him. The permissibility of this act is lucidly proven in the proofs presented for the permissibility of dhikr in congregation:

In Surah al-Baqarah (verse 152), Allah ﷻ states:

“So remember Me, [and] I shall remember you...”

Under this very verse, Imam Ala al-Din Ali al-Baghdadi (Allah shower His mercy upon him) - in Tafsir Al-Khazin - quotes the following hadith recorded by Imam Bukhari, which is narrated from Sayyiduna Abu Hurayrah (Allah is pleased with him):

“The Prophet ﷺ said: Allah ﷻ says: I am as My servant thinks of Me, and I am with him when he makes remembrance [dhikr] of Me. If he makes remembrance of Me privately, I make remembrance of him privately. If he makes remembrance of Me in a gathering, I make remembrance of him in a better gathering...”

If the gateway to realising Allah's ﷻ promise - so remember Me, [and] I shall remember you - can be found at gatherings of collective remembrance, surely our dear readers should now make it a priority to seek out and sit in the congregations of dhikr. This message is further emphasised by the following hadith (narrated by Imam Bukhari, Allah shower His mercy upon him):

"The Angels roam the roads in search of those who are remembering Allah ﷻ [and in another version of Imam Muslim, 'gatherings of dhikr']. When they find them [and in the version of Imam Muslim, they sit with them], they call each other: 'Come, your desire has been found', and shield those remembering Allah ﷻ - up to the first Heaven - with their wings.

Allah ﷻ - even though He knows the answer already - asks: 'What are my servants saying?'

The Angels reply: 'They are praising You, magnifying Your Name, glorifying You, and attributing You with the best of qualities!'

Allah ﷻ asks: "Have they witnessed me?"

The Angels reply: "O our Lord! They have not witnessed you'.

Allah ﷻ asks: 'What would be their state if they witnessed Me?'

The Angels reply: 'O our Lord! If they had witnessed you, they would [fervently] increase in praising You, magnifying Your Name, glorifying You, and attributing You with the best of qualities'

Allah ﷻ asks: 'What are they asking for?'

The Angels reply: 'O our Lord! They are asking to be entered into Heaven'.

Allah ﷻ asks: 'Have they seen Heaven?'

The Angels reply: 'O our Lord! They have not seen Heaven'.

Allah ﷻ asks: 'What would be their state if they saw Heaven?'

The Angels reply: "O our Lord! By seeing Heaven, their desire for it will increase exponentially!'

Allah ﷻ asks: 'What do they fear, and run away from?'

The Angels reply: 'O our Lord! They are seeking refuge from Hell'.

Allah ﷻ asks: 'Have they seen Hell?'.

The Angels reply: 'O our Lord! They have not seen Hell'.

Allah ﷻ asks: 'What would be their state if they saw Hell?'

The Angels reply: 'O our Lord! By seeing Hell, they would fear it even more, and run further away from it'.

Allah ﷻ states: '[Angels] I am making you [all] witnesses that I have forgiven them!'

The Angels reply: 'O our Lord! There is one amongst them who is not there for Your remembrance, rather he is there for some other reason'.

Allah ﷻ states: 'These groups are such that even those sitting amongst will have their sins forgiven!.'

This hadith sufficiently demonstrates the merit of assembling for collective remembrance (dhikr), and highlights that certain acts of worship reap greater reward when performed in a group than when alone:

"Two believers - that lend support to each other - are like a pair of hands that wash each other clean." {Sunan Abu Dawud}

This is why collective remembrance is advocated so much; it is the place where hearts meet in mutual harmony; the weak can benefit from the strong, and those in darkness can be enlightened by those with light.

There are many more examples from both the Qur'an and sunnah, which we could have referred to. Nevertheless, the conclusion is the same: It is permitted to perform dhikr in a group, and that this action is recommended and meritorious.

We finish this section with the following - self-explanatory - narration (Tirmidhi, Muslim, and Ibn Majah, Allah shower His mercy upon them all):

"A group does not sit mentioning Allah ﷻ except that the Angels cover, and surround them with mercy; tranquility descends upon them, [and] Allah ﷻ mentions them to those present with Him."

Standing Remembrance

The hadrah commences when the assembly stands, and the acceptance of remembering Allah ﷻ when standing is proven by the following analysis on the permissible postures when remembering Allah ﷻ:

In Surah Ali 'Imran (verse 191), Allah ﷻ states:

"[Those] who remember Allah whilst standing, sitting [lying], or on their sides..."

It is said - under this verse - in Tafsir al-Khazin:

"The majority of commentators (mufassirin) take this verse to mean consistency upon the remembrance of Allah ﷻ in almost all states, as the states of standing, sitting, and lying upon one's side encompass almost all possible human postures."

The author also narrates the following hadith under the same verse:

"The Messenger ﷺ would mention Allah ﷻ at all the times (and in every state)."

Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin al-Jarir al-Tabari relates from Ibn Jurayj (Allah shower His mercy upon them both):

"This verse refers to the remembrance of Allah ﷻ in prayer, as well as other than prayer, and in the recitation of the Qur'an."

In Surah al-Kahf (verse 14), Allah ﷻ states:

"And we made firm their hearts when they stood up and said: 'Our Lord is the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth...'"

Imam 'Alusi (Allah shower His mercy upon him) in Tafsir Ruh al-Ma'ani writes under this verse:

"Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abi Khatam have related that they [the people of the cave] came out of the city... and a man from amongst them said: 'Indeed I find something within myself, which I assume no else possesses'.

They replied: 'What is it?'

He said: 'I find in myself [a firm belief] that indeed My Lord is the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth'.

They also said similar, and they all stood and said: 'Our Lord is the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth...'"

The verses of the noble Qur'an mentioned above are both decisive in evidence, and explicit in their meaning; clearly permitting the remembrance of Allah ﷻ whilst standing.

Movement (Raqs) in Remembrance

The movement (raqs) during hadrah - which vary across different orders of Sufism – consists of a few simple movements. The proofs for the permissibility of performing these actions are clearly established in this section:

In Surah al-Anfal (verse 2) Allah ﷻ states:

"Verily the believers are those [that] when Allah is mentioned, their hearts become fearful, and when His verses are recited upon them, it increases their [certainty of] faith..."

The Arabic word for 'become fearful' in this verse is 'wajilat', and the commentators of the Qur'an mention that this word refers to a state in which the hearts shake with fear due to the remembrance of their Lord, and in turn, the point of when the heart shakes is the cause for the rest of the body to do the same. This position is furthered by Surah al-Zumar (verse 23):

"The skins shiver therefrom of those who fear their Lord; then their skins and their hearts relax at the remembrance of Allah."

Imam Habib Mashhur al-Haddad (Allah shower His mercy upon him) comments on this verse:

"The 'softening of the heart' is the sensitivity and timidity that occurs as a result of nearness [qurb], and tajalli [manifestation of one or more Divine Attributes]. As for the 'softening of the skin' this is the ecstasy and swaying from side to side, which result from intimacy and manifestation, or from fear and awe. No blame is attached to someone who has reached this rank, i.e. if he sways and chants, for in the painful throes of love and passion he finds something which arouses the highest yearning..."

Imam Bukhari, Imam Muslim, and Imam Nasa'i (Allah shower His mercy upon them all) all narrated the hadith of Sayyidah 'Aishah (Allah is pleased with her):

"I saw the Messenger of Allah ﷺ standing at the door of my chamber whilst the Abyssinians were playing in the masjid. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ covered me with his mantle; I was looking towards their playing with their spears."

There are many similar narrations in Sahih Muslim and in Jami al-Tirmidhi; one word that is common across all of these narrations: 'Yazfinuna', which is derived from 'zafan'. The word zafan, according to al-Sihah, means 'raqs (to move)'. Zamakhshari in Asas al-Balaghah, and Imam al-Zubaydi in in Taj al-'Urus remarked the same:

"Raqs is to move high and low"

Imam Ahmad (Allah shower His mercy upon him) narrates from Sayyiduna Anas (Allah is pleased with him):

"The Abyssinians were moving and dancing in front of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ whilst saying 'Muhammad abdun salih (Muhammad the pious slave [of Allah])'. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ questioned what

are they saying? It was said: 'They are saying 'Muhammad abdun salih'."

This hadith uses the word 'raqs', so if it was not permitted, surely the Messenger of Allah ﷺ would have stopped the Abyssinians on both occasions. Therefore, we can explicitly prove, through the two aforementioned narrations, and the ones forthcoming, the permissibility of physically moving during the remembrance of Allah ﷻ.

Imam al-Suyuti (Allah shower His mercy upon him) in al-Hawi quotes the following hadith from the Musnad of Imam Ahmad (Allah shower His mercy upon him):

"Ja'far bin Abi Talib danced in front the Messenger of Allah ﷺ because He said to him: 'You resemble my character and my appearance'."

Commenting on this hadith, Imam al-Suyuti (Allah shower His mercy upon him) makes mention that this movement was due to the ecstasy felt by Sayyiduna Ja'far (Allah shower His mercy upon him) after hearing the blessed words of the final Messenger ﷺ, and nor did the Messenger ﷺ stop or rebuke his actions.

Imam Ahmad (Allah shower His mercy upon him) narrates similar from Sayyiduna Ali (Allah is pleased with him):

"Ja'far stood and hopped around the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ asked: 'What is this?' He answered: 'Something which the Abyssinians do with their kings'."

Furthermore, there are further narrations from other companions regarding the hopping of Sayyiduna Ja'far bin Abi Talib (Allah is pleased with him). In particular one narration states that three companions at this point performed this action, they were: Sayyiduna Ja'far, Sayyiduna 'Ali, and Sayyiduna Zaid (as narrated in Tawsheeh 'al as-Saheeh). In a longer narration of Imam Bukhari, the reasons for their rapture are mentioned: For Sayyiduna 'Ali (Allah is pleased with him) it was because the Prophet ﷺ said to him: 'You are from me and I am from you'; for Sayyiduna Ja'far (Allah is pleased with him) it was because the Prophet ﷺ said to him: 'You resemble my character

and my appearance'; for Sayyiduna Zaid (Allah is pleased with him) it was because the Prophet ﷺ said to him: 'You are my brother and my Mawla (servant, aid, or friend)'.

It is narrated by Ibn al-Husayn al-Sulami (Allah shower His mercy upon him) in Kitab al-Futuwwah:

"...When Abu Bakr came into the presence of our master, and heard the good news from the lips of the beloved Prophet ﷺ, he got up, thanked Allah, said: 'Indeed I am pleased with my Lord!', and in his joy whirled around three times."

From the hadiths above, we have understood that the noble companions stood and carried out certain movements and actions while remembering Allah ﷻ, and His Messenger ﷺ. The traditional hadrah is an extension of what was performed by those companions. That is to say its roots are from the actions of the noble companions, and it is an accepted principle that a derived issue (fara') has the same ruling as its root (asl). So when the root – i.e. the movement (raqs) of the noble companions around the Prophet ﷺ - is permitted, then its fara' (the traditional hadrah) is permitted also.

We finish this section noting that the majority of the scholars of the Ahl al-Sunnah have related an ijama (unanimous consensus) on the permissibility of moving whilst remembering Allah ﷻ. Imam al-Sha'rani (Allah shower His mercy upon him) writes in Madarij al-Salikin:

"The 'ulema have a consensus that it is necessary for a faqir to make the dhikr of Allah ﷻ with complete strength, in a way that there remains no space in him, in such a way that he moves [shakes] from the top of his head, to the soles of his feet..."

Imam al-Ghazali (Allah shower His mercy upon him) in his Ihya explains:

"If raqs (moving whilst making dhikr) was forbidden (haram), then Sayyidah 'Aisha would have not looked towards the Abyssinians - along with the Prophet ﷺ - while they were doing raqs."

Shaykh Ibn Ajibah (Allah shower His mercy upon him) writes in Sharh al-Mabahith:

"The impartiality in the matter is to say that the origin of raqs is permitted."

He further writes:

"I say there are mass narrations from both the old and new Sufis, east and west, that they gather for the dhikr of Allah ﷻ, [and whilst] standing they make raqs (movement). It has not reached us from anyone among the trusted scholars that they have placed denial upon them. Verily I have seen in Fez in Zawiyah al-Saqliyiin a group making the dhikr of Allah ﷻ, and performing raqs [standing dhikr with movement] from the 'Asr prayer on the day of Jumuah until Maghrib prayer; this was done in the presence of many scholars, and not a single one of them denounced it."

Vocal Remembrance

The remembrance of Allah ﷻ can be performed in three distinct manners:

- 1) Vocal remembrance: This is audible dhikr that is made with the tongue;
- 2) Intellectual remembrance (with the 'aql): this is to contemplate upon the evidences and signs that showcase Uniqueness of Allah ﷻ;
- 3) Remembrance with the heart: this is to remember Allah ﷻ in the heart.

Our discussion focuses upon the first because remembering Allah ﷻ audibly is a fundamental aspect of the hadrah, and its proofs as follows:

In Surah al-Baqarah (verse 200), Allah ﷻ states:

"...remember Allah like your [previous] remembrance of your fathers, or with [much] greater remembrance..."

During the days of ignorance, after completing Hajj (as it was performed then) people would stand in front of the Ka'bah and verbally mention their ancestors with pride. With this said, it is not hidden upon the people of understanding that this verse refers to vocal remembrance, and therefore, out of necessity, proves the permissibility of remembering Allah ﷻ audibly.

In Surah al-Nisa (verse 103), Allah ﷻ states:

“And when you have completed the prayer, remember Allah standing, sitting, or [lying] on your sides...”

It is narrated by al-Tabari (Allah shower His mercy upon him) in his tafsir, as well as in al-Durr by Imam Suyuti (Allah shower His mercy upon him) that Sayyiduna Ibn Abbas (Allah is pleased with him) said the following in regards to this verse:

“In the night and the day, on land and in the sea, on a journey, and in residency, in richness and in poverty, in sickness and in health, silent and vocally, and upon every state.’ ...”

In Surah al- Baqarah (verse 152) Allah ﷻ states:

“So remember Me, [and] I shall remember you...”

In this verse Allah ﷻ has commanded us to remember Him. This is an unqualified, general command. Therefore, according to the legal principles of the Hanafi School, an unqualified Qur’anic command cannot become qualified, and it must be said that this verse refers to both silent and audible remembrance, which makes either of them recommended due to the command of Allah ﷻ.

Imam Tirmidhi (Allah shower His mercy upon him), and Imam Abu Dawud (Allah shower His mercy upon him) narrate from Sayyiduna Abu Qatada (Allah is pleased with him):

“The Prophet ﷺ went out at night, and found Abu Bakr praying in a low voice, and he passed Umar ibn al-Khattab who was raising his voice while praying.

When they both met the Prophet ﷺ together, the Prophet ﷺ said: ‘I passed by you, Abu Bakr, when you were praying in a low voice’.

He replied: ‘I made Him hear, with Whom I was holding intimate converse, O Messenger of Allah ﷺ’.

The Prophet ﷺ said to Umar: 'I passed by you when you were praying in a loud voice'.

He replied: 'O Messenger of Allah ﷺ! I was awakening the drowsy, and driving away the Devil'.

Al-Hasan added in his version: 'The Prophet ﷺ said: 'Raise your voice a little Abu Bakr', and he said to Umar: 'Lower your voice a little'...'"

We understand from the aforementioned narration that the Prophet ﷺ advised Sayyiduna Umar (Allah is pleased with him) to lower his voice a little to avoid disturbing others, whilst advising Sayyiduna Abu Bakr (Allah is pleased with him) to become more audible. Both commands infer permissibility, and we can derive that vocal remembrance holds a higher rank than silent remembrance.

Singing in Remembrance

The final component of the hadrah we wish to discuss is singing in the remembrance of Allah ﷻ, and more specifically, the singing of odes and verses that have been cast in praise of Allah ﷻ and his Messenger ﷺ, the permissibility of which can be found in the following:

It is well established that praising Allah ﷻ, and His Messenger ﷺ is from the most virtuous actions, and that to praise Allah ﷻ, and His Messenger ﷺ in poetry is also permitted. Imam Bukhari (Allah shower His mercy upon him) narrates:

"Truly, in some poetry, there is wisdom."

Imam Muslim (Allah shower His mercy upon him) narrates:

"One day when I rode behind Allah's Messenger ﷺ, he said [to me]: 'Do you remember any poetry of Umayya bin Abi Salt?'

I said: 'Yes'.

He said: 'Then go on'.

I recited a couplet, and he said: 'Go on'.

Then I again recited a couplet, and he said: 'Go on'.

I recited one hundred couplets (of his poetry)."

It is well documented that there were poets, and singers of poetry among the noble companions. The most famous of them are: Sayyiduna Abdullah ibn Rawaha, Sayyiduna Ka'ab ibn Malik, Sayyiduna Ka'ab ibn Zuhair, and Sayyiduna Hasan ibn Thabit (Allah is pleased with them all).

It was Sayyiduna Ka'ab ibn Zuhayr (Allah is pleased with him) who so eloquently praised the Prophet ﷺ, and the emigrants with his poem 'Banat Su'aad', and as he completed the recital of all 58 verses, the Prophet ﷺ rose up, and wrapped his own cloak around Sayyiduna Ka'ab (Allah is pleased with him) in appreciation.

Without going through more proofs, which are many, we can understand from the narrations above that praising Allah ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ in the forms of poetry and singing is permitted, and recommended.

Conclusion

All praise is for Allah ﷻ! Who granted us the ability to clearly establish and prove the permissibility of the hadrah. Any individual who is seeking the truth on this matter will surely have to admit that the hadrah is at the very least a recommended (mustahab) act.

We finish this epistle with the following anecdote from Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Khaldi (Allah shower His mercy upon him), which has been narrated by Shaykh al-Akbar (Allah shower His mercy upon him) with an authentic isnad:

"I was with Junayd whilst travelling to the Hijaz, when we came to mount Tur Sinai. Junayd climbed it, and we climbed alongside him. When we stood in the exact place in which Sayyiduna Musa stood, we were in awe.

With us was a qawwal (a performer of qawwali), Junayd indicated to him to sing...

...Junaid came into a state of ecstasy [state of love and passion], and we also came into this state of ecstasy. Not a single one of us knew if we were in the sky, or upon the earth.

Close by there was a monastery in which there was a monk. He called us: 'O the nation of Muhammad! By Allah answer me!'

Not a single one of us turned towards him because of the pure blessed time. He called us for the second time: 'By the righteous religion, will you not answer me?'

Not a single one of us answered him, so he called for the third time: 'By Whom you worship, will you not answer me?'

Not a single one of us gave him a reply.

When we calmed down from the sama' (the singing of poetry), Junayd decided to climb back down. We said to Junayd: 'Indeed this monk called us, and placed upon us an oath, and we did not reply to him'.

Junayd said: 'Return with us, it may be that Allah guides him towards Islam'.

We called him, and he came down towards us and greeted us. He said: 'Which one of you is the teacher?'

Junayd said: 'All of them are leaders and teachers'.

He said: 'It is necessary that there be one who is the greatest of them'.

They [companions of Junayd] indicated towards Junayd. The monk then said: 'Give me news regarding that which you just performed? Is it special with your religion, or is it general to all?'

Junaid answered: '[It is] rather special'.

The monk said: 'Is it for a specific group of people, or granted to all?'

Junayd replied: 'For a specific group of people.'

He asked: 'With what intention did you stand?'

Junayd said: 'With the intention of hope and happiness with Allah the Most High.'

The monk said: 'With what intention did you listen?'

Junayd said: 'With the intention of listening from Allah the Most High.'

He said: 'With what intention did you cry out?'

Junayd replied: 'With the intention of the acceptance of worship, because Allah the Most High states: 'Am I not your lord? They said 'Yes! We testify.''

The monk asked: 'So what was this sound?'

Junayd said: 'A pre-eternal call.'

He asked: 'With what intention did you sit?'

Junayd said: 'With the intention of fear from Allah the Most High.'

The monk said: 'You spoke the truth.'

The monk then said to Junayd: 'Stretch your hand out, I testify that there is no deity but Allah, alone, He has no partners, and I testify that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger.'

The monk became Muslim and his Islam was good.

Junayd then said to him: 'With what did you recognise that I spoke the truth?'

He answered: 'Because of what I read in the Bible, which was revealed upon the Messiah, the son of Mary: 'The special amongst the nation of Muhammad will wear a khirfah (a specific clothing), they will eat crumbs (small amount), they will be pleased with subsistence, they will stand in the purest of their times with Allah, rejoicing, towards Him they will yearn, in Him, they are in a state of ecstasy, towards Him, they desire, and from Him, they fear'.

The monk remained with us for three days then he died, may Allah have mercy upon him..."

O Allah ﷻ! We hear and we obey. We seek Your forgiveness, and to You is the final destination. May we remember You at all times; standing, sitting, and on our sides! Amin!